DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 277 531 RC 016 062

AUTHOR Medicine, Beatrice
TITLE Child Socialization among Native Americans: The Lakota (Sioux) in Cultural Context.
PUB DATE 85
NOTE 7p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Journal Articles (080)
JOURNAL CIT Wicazo Sa Review; v1 n2 p23-28 Fall 1985

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS American Indian Culture; *American Indians; *Child Rearing; Cultural Background; Cultural Differences; *Cultural Influences; Cultural Interrelationships; Ethnology; Females; Personal Narratives; Research Methodology; *Role Perception; *Sex Role; Sexual Identity; *Socialization; Traditionalism; Values
IDENTIFIERS *Lakota (Tribe); Teton Sioux (Tribe)

ABSTRACT

Child socialization research among American Indians must account for tribal differences, examining gender roles in a given tribal culture, and employing studies of enculturation and acculturation, life histories, and ethnographies. Child socialization in the Teton Sioux or Lakota tribe can be used to illustrate these research techniques. The Lakota typified a mobile hunting/warring society with flexible, band-type social organization, strong emphasis on the extended family reckoned bilaterally, and definite and well-defined sex roles. Lakota children learned gender role behavior through precept and example, appropriate toys, and mimicry of adult activities. Role models, supernatural sanctions, and recourse to a value system were patterns for conformity. The destruction by white dominance of the warrior-hunter-provider role for males and the relatively unchanged female roles forced adjustments in the traditional role balance. What remains of the traditional balance is found in the sense of self and relationship with others and the world. Differences in cognition and behavior between white and native culture can be examined in such concepts as the actualization of "wakan" or power in Lakota women and the use of the wakan qualities of women to carry on the traditional socialization of children. (LFL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED277531

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☒ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Elizabeth Cook-Lynn

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

[Essay]

Child Socialization Among Native Americans: The Lakota (Sioux) In Cultural Context

Dr. Beatrice Medicine has accepted a three-year appointment as the new Director of the Native Centre at the University of Calgary at Alberta, Canada.

There is no *one* America Indian: as with any other peoples, pre-contact native societies varied culturally, linguistically, and technologically. Therefore, when we talk about child socialization or "primitive education" among Native Americans, we must be specific about the tribal group we are discussing. The common theme that all Native American cultures share is the post-contact decimation of peoples, the destruction of native life-styles and languages, and the subordination of aboriginal peoples in what has been called a "civilizing" process toward a superimposed "superior" mode of life. The subjection to a dominant, White, racist society is the common experience for Native Americans in the present day. The aspects of racism and sexism impact Native Americans of all ages and in all socio-economic spheres of life and in all Indian communities—reservation, rural, and urban — in the contemporary era.

In order to understand the impact of gender roles upon American Indian children, one must look to their tribal affiliations. To concentrate upon a generalized "Pan-Indian" or "inter-tribal" culture negates the uniqueness of children in each tribal heritage. A poignant example from the Southwest comes to mind. At a school dance in which Anglo teachers were instructing Navajo students in the expected social behavior of adolescents in the dominant society, these harbingers of "culture" randomly selected young males and females and forced them to dance together. As some of these students were from the same clan, this physical contact was akin to a sexual encounter. In their minds, incestuous relations were forced upon these students. This occurred at a Bureau of Indian Affairs school. There are equally horrendous examples which can be divulged for Indian students in public schools where approximately sixty percent of our children are presently enrolled.

To understand sex roles, one must look at research which deals with the demarcation of the learning process as it relates to gender roles in a given tribal culture. The learning of proper and acceptable gender roles in a matrilineal society like the Navajo would certainly be different from a patrilineal society such as the Cahuilla or a bilateral one like the Lakota (Sioux). The parameters of cultural transmission and the implications for becoming a functioning member of each society must be understood. Many ethnographies of various tribal groups present socialization processes which show the internalization and actualization of sex roles. Excellent sources for each tribe may be found in bibliographic works such as Murdock[1]. Any adequate ethnography or anthropological study particularly oriented to the *en*culturation — that is, processes by which tribal members learn to be members of that group—will be helpful. Many of these ethnographies present lifeways as they existed before the advent of the European colonizers and explicitly outline sex role learning in native societies.

Life histories of males and females in tribal groups are particularly good examples of learning to be a male or a female in the so-called "primitive" societies of North America. Such life histories as Simmons[2] for the Hopi; Dyk[3] for the Navajo; LaFlesche[4] for the Omaha; and Standing Bear[5] for the Lakota (Sioux) are excellent starting points to obtain the male

RC016062

perspective. My bibliography in the *Indian Historian*[6] includes many life histories of women of all tribes. These anthropological studies present data for an understanding of what it means for children who have grown up in a tribal tradition and have internalized these different tribal values and world views. This is one method by which one may obtain materials to understand the specific tribal experiences which Native American individuals enact in the present day.

Although there are some specific studies[7] on child training which are superb models for delineating the socialization of children, if one truly is concerned how each Indian child reflects his/her cultural heritage, one must hone the data from the ethnographies. Only then can we consider the issue of cross-cultural child training which we must have if we are to understand the effects of the cultures of approximately two hundred on-going Native American cultures in the present day.

Additionally, since many Native Americans were required as a survival technique to learn another culture, *ac*culturation studies also are important to understand the functioning of male and female roles in contemporary Indian cultures. As if this were not sufficiently overwhelming, the aspect of urbanization of tribal members adds another dimension in the life styles of Indian children and adults.[8]

In an attempt to provide a research model, I shall focus upon one native group known in the anthropological literature as the Teton Sioux, who call themselves the Lakota, and who speak a dialect of the Siouxan language stock, also called Lakota.

Culturally, the Teton fit into a generalized Plains area with a dependence upon buffalo and other large game animals as a food and clothing supply. Essentially, they typify, along with other Plains tribes such as the Cheyenne, Blackfeet, Comanche, and others, a mobile hunting and warring society with a flexible, band-type social organization. Among the Lakota, there was a strong emphasis upon the *tiospaye*, translated to mean "extended family." Kinship was reckoned bilaterally with a tendency toward patrilocal residence. Generally, this culture has been characterized as a "Warrior Society"[9] and considered to be male dominant. Other features of this Plains society included the Sun Dance as a major ritual with minor cults such as the *Yuwipi*; use of a portable skin *tipi* with proper protocol in care and seating; and definite and well defined sex roles in economic, social and ritual aspects of life.

In examining ethnographic data, one must always be aware of the ideational realm. The value system which underpins the sanctions for behavioral acts is important to understanding personality formation and cultural expectations of proper behavior. The value system underlies behavioral events and these values are often extolled through expressive elements of cultural such as ritual, folklore, and music. Rights, duties, reciprocal acts are significant as they are revealed through proper enactment of sex roles.

Among the Western Sioux, the four cardinal virtues for men were bravery, fortitude, generosity and wisdom. In contrast, the cultural sanctions for women recognized role transitions. The highest virtues were industry, hospitality, kindness and chastity for unmarried females and fidelity and fecundity among married women. The internalization and externalization of these ideals and approved conduct were sanctioned by rituals and supernatural dictates and ceremonies for both males and females. Naming ceremonies, acts of favored child (*hunka*) selection for either male or female, vision quests for men which were analogous to a rite of passage from adolescence to adulthood, and a special ceremony for girls at the menarche apparently effectively prepared children for adult roles. Men's societies (*akicita*) and women's associations upheld these ideals and provided honor, prestige, and recognition not only to the individual but also to the *tiospaye* (extended family). A delicate balance was achieved in the economic realm which was definitely oriented to male pursuits of the hunt and war. Women's economic role was supplementary to male activities.

How was proper sex role behavior learned in this society? Lakota children learned their expected gender role behavior through precept and example as do most children in any non-literate society in which face-to-face relationships are all-important. Mirsky[10] based much of her analysis upon Ella Deloria's field notes and gives a good account of the learning process of Lakota children. In an outstanding book on "primitive education" of Indian children, Pettit writes for the Plains tribes in general, "First plaything is a miniature bow given to male children as early as four years old by a proud father. Mother makes and dresses dolls for girls."[11] It is in the life histories, however, that one obtains the flavor and nuances of native learning systems and cultural transmission. Luther Standing Bear[12] indicates that kindness was salient in the

parents' treatment of children for they wanted to develop a reciprocal love in the hearts of their sons and daughters. Miniature items of material culture such as cradle boards, dolls, bows and arrows, and games of hunt and war, the tipi, camp moves and mimicry of adult activities were means of learning appropriate role behavior and expectations. Role models of a "good" character presented proper and expected behavioral guides to male and female children. As in all native societies which depended upon informal learning procedures, supernatural sanctions and recourse to the value system combined with aspects of shame for coercion and honor for prestige were profound patterns for conformance in Lakota society. The symmetry and equilibrium between sex roles in Lakota society was learned through observation, imitation, and buttressed through mythology, folklore and the larger belief system.

Play was an important way to learn one's place in this social group. The Lakota allowed siblings of the opposite sex to participate in these peer play groups until about the age of seven years. Then, male and female siblings were separated. Aspects of extreme respect were instilled. Direct eye to eye contact during conversation was disapproved. This was the time when a girl learned that her relationship to her brother was one of extreme respect and responsibility. Her future behavior was one in which she would do nothing but honor him and the reciprocal responsibility was his. She was expected to receive the scalps when he returned from a successful war encounter. She was expected to make his firstborn a completely quilled (later, beaded) cradle board. Her behavior could not detract in any way from his prestige and honor. In turn, he protected her honor and cared for her material needs until she obtained a husband to do this. Quite often, it was a "kola" (friend) or a member of his warrior society who became his brother-in-law.

Hassrick says:

> The division of labor was a cooperatively designed arrangement wherein each sex did that work for which they believed they were best suited. That women's work involved the labors of tanning, carrying wood, and on occasion bearing burdens in no way inferred a low status. Evidence to the contrary is offered by the high position of women among the Sioux, the values placed upon virtue, upon child-bearing, and upon industry and craftsmanship.[13]

The fact that sororal polygyny and the mother-in-law avoidance were operative indicates an understanding of the dynamics of human relationships. This is not to say that pre-contact native societies were without stresses and strains, however, to give a male viewpoint, Hassrick writes:

> In a society which accepts polygamy as a man's prerogative, in which by the mere beat of a drum a man might announce the dissolution of his marriage, in a group where man's advances were so insistent that unmarried women were protected by constant chaperonage even to the extent of wearing chastity belts, the ideal of monogamous virtue at first appears out of context. And yet, monogamy was not inconsistent with the Sioux way, possibly if for no other reason than it was really less bothersome. While the double standard undoubtedly had its male advocates, it certainly must have created difficult and embarrassing situations for the girl and her family. Divorce, too, meant a certain upheaval, even outside the family circle. It frequently involved emotional tensions through jealousy, retribution, and unrequited love, and not a few divorces ended in murder.[14]

Though the male and female roles were strictly defined, there were allowances for sexual preferences and deviances among the Lakota (and many other Native American societies). The culturally-sanctioned and institutionalized female role of the *berdache* was an option for men who could not function in the stringent role of a warrior or who had homosexual tendencies. Dreaming allowed a Lakota female to reject her role as wife and mother and to become a *winkte* (literally "crazy woman" or whore). Institutionalized options allowed for individual sexual affinities. These roles were accepted and in some instances, the berdache was important in naming children and important in rituals. Clearly a strong belief in individual autonomy applied to both sexes among the Lakota.

The confinement of the Lakota upon reservations with the repression of rituals (prohibition of the Sun Dance) and the destruction of the male role as warrior and hunter and provider for the family had great repercussions upon the dyadic relationships between the sexes.

Poor sources for this early period of reservation life have obscured the nature of the changing roles of males and females in Lakota

society. The dogmatic and unreasonable actions of government agents who controlled native life during this early reservation period can be glimpsed in such reports as those of Agents McGillicuddy for the Pine Ridge reservation and McLaughlin for Standing Rock Agency. These reports abound with intrigues and controls which such agents forced upon a confined and often starving native population. It is only through such reports as Standing Bear[15] that one glimpses early reservation life. The destruction of the warrior-hunter-provider role for males can be gleaned from the reports of white military men. The demoralizing aspects of vanquishment upon the Lakota males psyche is often underplayed. It seems that the female roles of mother, sister, and wife, were ongoing for the continued care of the family, which was now suddenly nuclear. The old *tiospaye* (extended family) was divided into allotments of land with neolocal, nuclear families the new rule. The strategies adopted for survival were apparently successful, for the Lakota and other tribal societies in America still exist today.

What remains today of the traditional balance in the Lakota way of life? Much more than outsiders may see. It is still true for Native Americans that learning about one's world and one's place in it and one's relationship to other beings is qualitatively different from White socialization patterns. The "unscientific" world of natives is shrouded in the mystical — all is mysterious because all is power. Learning about the mystical — the sacredness of all things — is based upon a finely-tuned subtlety which permeates all actions and thoughts and this quality is embedded in the very core of the psyche.

A sense of self and relationships with others and the world surrounding one are important features of a total world view. This is a part of an indigenous view of the world which is not frequently elicited. Therefore, for some native peoples, it is difficult to accept such statements as:

> There are many paths or "ways" to this awareness; one need not be Indian to arrive there. Indeed, one must be careful not to romanticize Indian "powers" or spirituality, especially since most Indians have lost touch with the Old Ways. On the other hand, there seems no doubt that traditional people the world over have much to teach a spiritually crippled race, which as Lame Deer said, sees "only with one eye."[16]

There is, in my estimation, a clear difference in how these "ways" are internalized. I am not interested in disputing the fact that "most Indians have lost touch with the Old Ways." After generations of assimilationist practices, the fact that most tribal peoples have been "brought up," as they say, in an "Indian Way," and have survived assimilation, is commendable. Perhaps tribal peoples should be flattered that there seems to be a constant quest for an essence of "ways" which has resulted in an expert core of "White shamans" as Paula Gunn, the Laguna poet, so incisively suggests. Oral recitations and verbalizations — most often in native languages — have been of sustained duration and significance in the socialization processes of Indian persons who grew up in a native milieu.

Living, thinking, and acting as a native person is an experience which is the result of generations of learning and actualizing a lifestyle which is transmitted through exceedingly unique cultural screens. In an effort to show the difference in cognition and behavior, I have chosen to examine (without revealing the inner most core of my tribal ethos and individual autonomy) the Lakota term — *wakan*, or power — as it pertains to females in Lakota Sioux culture.[17]

The major focus will be upon the actualization of the concept — *wakan* — in contemporary Lakota (Sioux) life. An analysis of this native gloss seems imperative to realize its dimensional implications. For those persons who are socialized in Lakota language and culture, health and well-being and interpersonal relationships are largely built upon this term. Others who are of Lakota ancestry but who are not native speakers often dismiss *wakan* as "holy" or "sacred." To these latter people, the connotations are not as significant in behavioral terms, but utilization of the term in explaining some unexplainable event or behavior serves to maintain ethnic boundaries from uncomprehending White people.

Wakan ki (all things which are mysterious, sacred, and unable to be explained) are still of utmost importance to those Siouan persons who speak the language and/or operate in a native idiom. *Wakan ki* is everywhere. The concept forms the bedrock of belief and action to those individuals who are socialized to uphold the Lakota life-way. The song which has been labeled "The Sioux National Anthem" has this refrain, *Lakota ki e yote wanla ye*. Translated into an equivalent English utterance, it might be thus stated, "I value the

Lakota way of life above all else." Songs, legends, folk tales which were recited to Lakota children emphasized this orientation. Certainly, this is not different from the enculturational process for any child in any culture. But for tribal peoples who have had their very language and culture devalued and debased, any attempt to maintain elements of the expressive culture as a means of providing a world view which differs from that of the larger society is a means of transmitting the ethos of Indian identity. Moreover, when adults — males and females — weep when they hear these words, the worth of Lakota culture becomes embedded in childish minds. Is Grandmother crying because she is sad? Is she crying for something which is lost? She makes the ululating sound and we mimic her, paying honor to something which is there but cannot be defined. Grandfather makes the sound of the bear and raises his staff when this refrain is sung, indicating that there is a force greater than all of us being addressed. When Father or Uncle makes the warrior's cry and dances in a circle, we all know we are celebrating that we are different. All these acts are meaningful. One feels the power which is real in a native realm. Feelings are more basic and fundamental than what one is supposed to feel when one covers one's heart while singing the "Star Spangled Banner" at school. Being a Lakota is a privilege and a birthright. No matter how pathetic we may have looked to spectators, they also felt a force that they could not understand. We, the little girls, followed the lead of our grandmothers and mothers, waving our hands in the air in an arc to indicate that all was one. Our weak "le le les"— as we called them — may never be as refined or clear as the esoteric bird which makes them, but we felt a kinship. It, too, honors the Lakota way.

These mundane ways taught us that we were a part of a culture which was organized upon a vague, pervasive, and undefined term called *wakan*. It was fearsome, but benevolent. It was all around us — in the earth (maka); *in the stones* (iyan); *in the sky* (mahk peya); *the sun and moon* (wi); *and in the powerful thunderbeings — thunder and lightning* (wakin ya ki). *When one of our parental surrogates said something (anything) was* wakan *we viewed it as awesome, for we could not fathom its power.*

How did Lakota children learn that they were part of a culture which organized a life-way upon this vague, but pervasive and undefined term? Because children are *wakan yes ba*, — "holy ones" or products of something *wakan* (mysterious). And because women have the mysterious power of creation, they also have powers which are recognized. Pregnancy is referred to as *e glu sha ka* ("to become stronger").

Recent efflorescences of supposedly submerged native rituals as the *hunka* (naming ceremonies and adoptions); vision quests (*hanbleceya*); memorial feasts (*wanagi ubapi* — "ghost-keeping"), *inipi* ("to make live" — sweat lodge); *yuwipi* ceremony; and the Sun Dance (*wi wang wacipi* — "sun gazing") stress different connotations of *wakan*. The concept is broad and the flexibility and enactment of the power rests upon the individual participant and the individual religious practitioner or ritualist. Due to the strong individual autonomy inherent in contemporary Lakota rituals, one must not reveal the *wakan* aspects of dreams, visions, and events which occurred on individual *hanbleceya* — "crying for visions" or the "vision quest" of other Lakota persons. If one chooses to do so, one can reveal one's own.

Reinvigorated rituals and mythical systems as mediated through *wakan* reflect new social concerns in some of these native enclaves. Ritual as therapy or as a mode for dealing with dissonances caused by intrusions from another culture are also evident. Thus, some Lakota males have sought redress from alcohol addiction by participating in native rituals, specifically the Sun Dance.[18]

Though the power achievement was well within the reach of Lakota women, this aspect was eroded during the acculturational period when reservation life was oriented toward obtaining the values of the dominant society. As we have seen, Lakota women tended to be mediators in this change process. It is only during the Sun Dance ceremonies that the values of the Dakota are invoked strongly for women. The choice for the Sacred Pipe Woman in the Sun Dance is tied to the valued qualities of womanhood as are the requirements for those maidens to chop the tree symbolically. Though vision seeking has been resumed for some Lakota males, corollary rites for women as the *tapa ex peya* (ball throwing rites) and other puberty rites for girls (as the *esh-na-ti*) have not been revitalized. Yet, the power of women is recognized. When ceremonies go awry, dissonance is often blamed upon women who are "in that phase of the moon." Power is seen as polluting in the present time, and not as it was traditionally. *Wakan* qualities of womanhood produced

wakan yes ha (children) which guaranteed the continuity of Lakota beings.

Thus, the *wakan* qualities of women were great, for upon them rested the socialization of children and the perpetuation of the Lakota people.

[1]Murdock, George Peter, ed., *Ethnographic Bibliography of North America*, 4th Edition, New Haven: Human Relations Area Files, 1976.

[2]Simmons, Leo, *Sun Chief, The Autobiography of a Hopi Indian*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1942, Reprinted 1971.

[3]Dyk, Walter, *Son of Old Man Hat — An Autobiography of a Navajo Indian*, New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1938.

[4]LaFlesche, Francis, *The Middle Five*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1963.

[5]Standing Bear, Luther, *My People, the Sioux*, Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1928; *Land of the Spotted Eagle*, Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1933.

[6]Medicine, Bea, "The Roles of Women in Native American Societies," in *The Indian Historian*, 8/3:50-54 (Summer 1975).

[7]Hilger M. Inez, *Chippewa Child Life and Its Cultural Background*, Washington, D.C.: Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 146, 1951; *Arapabo Child Life and Its Cultural Background*, Washington, D.C.: Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 148, 1952.

[8]Medicine, Bea, "The Native Americans" in Spiegel, Don, and Patrician Keith-Spiegel, *Outsiders, Use*, San Francisco: Rinehart Press, 1973, pp. 391-407.

[9]Hassrick, Royal, *The Sioux*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964.

[10]Mirsky, Jeannette, "The Dakota," in Mead, Margaret, *Cooperation and Competition Among Primitive Peoples*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1937.

[11]Pettit, G. A., "Primitive Education in North America" in *University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology*, 43:42 (1946).

[12]Standing Bear, Luther, *Land of the Spotted Eagle*, Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1933, p. 9.

[13]Hassrick, Royal, op cit., p. 196.

[14]Ibid., p. 46.

[15]Standing Bear, Luther, *My People, the Sioux*, Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1928

[16]Mattheissen, Peter, "Native Earth," *American West* 19/3:49 (May-June, 1982).

[17]A recent contribution by Raymond J. DeMallie and Robert H. Lavenda entitled, "Wakan: Plains Siouan Concept of Power, (in Fogelson, R., and R. H. Adams (eds.), *The Anthropology of Power*, New York: Academic Press, 1977, pp. 153-165) used published and archival sources to present a lucid account of this pervasive component among Siouan speakers. The authors explicitly state that they are not attempting to "delineate power concepts among these groups at the present time," (p. 154). However, they have done an admirable job of coalescing previous writers (Brown, Joseph E., *The Sacred Pipe*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1953; Densmore, Frances *Teton Sioux Music*, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 61, Washington, D. C., 1918; Dorsey, J. Owen, "A Study of Siouan Cults," in Bureau of American Ethnology Annual Report, 11:351-544, Washington, D.C., 1890; Niehardt, John G., *Black Elk Speaks*, New York: Morrow, 1932; Walker, J.R., *The Sun Dance and Other Ceremonies of the Oglala Division of the Teton Dakota*, Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History 16/2:49-221, (1917)).

[18]Medicine, Bea, "Wakan," in Anthopological Resource Center *Newsletter*, 5/4:4-5, 1981.